



Minutes from the regular meeting of the
Asheville Downtown Commission
January 9, 2009 at 8:30 am
Office of Economic Development
29 Haywood Street in downtown Asheville

Members Present: Jan Davis, Pat Whalen, John Rogers, Brad Galbraith, Pam Myers, Kitty Love, Guadalupe Chavarria, Byron Greiner, Jesse Plaster, Dwight Butner, Peter Alberice

Members Absent: none

Staff Present: Sasha Vrtunski, Jessica Bernstein, Stephanie Monson,

Chairman Whalen called the meeting to order at 8:30 am

Minutes

A motion was made by Galbraith to approve the minutes from the regular December 2008 meeting; seconded by Davis and approved unanimously

Updates

- Whalen noted that Monson had prepared the Commissions Annual Report for 2008 and it has been delivered to City Council; any comments or edits should be sent to Monson as soon as possible.
- Whalen welcomed new member Greiner to the Commission. Greiner is serving in the ex-officio seat for the Asheville Downtown Association's President.

Downtown Master Plan Draft Document Review

Review Process

Vrtunski outlined the review process for the document, which includes: a public presentation at the Civic Center on January 15 wherein the executive summary will be available to all attendees (the full document is online); a 30 day public comment period, during which presentation boards will be on display at the downtown branch of the Buncombe Library and draft plan copies and comment boxes will be placed in 3 storefronts downtown; initial presentation to the Planning and Zoning Commission on January 22nd; continued review by the Downtown Commission at their regular meeting on February 13; a special meeting of the Downtown Commission around February 20th for final review, final review by Planning and Zoning on March 6th; and review by City Council to consider plan adoption starting March 6, 2009.

Commission Comments and Questions

The purpose of this session was to get input and provide clarification on detailed aspects of this plan draft. It was noted that the draft that has been released is actually the 3rd draft

document, meaning many fine tunings based on the Advisory Panel process and public input have been made. Many public meetings occurred during this process and the intent and outcome of those meetings are recorded and available online.

Regarding this draft, comments from the Downtown Commission, the public, Planning and Zoning, and the Downtown Master Plan Advisory Board will be considered; the draft plan could warrant changes when common themes develop in response/as a reaction to plan content.

These minutes do not reflect draft plan content, rather they serve to record comments and questions from Commission members.

- The height diagram is confusing
- The design guidelines and UDO design requirements should be presented in as readily understandable a format as possible so that they are easily accessible to those who won't be using them on a daily basis, such as developers, City Council, and member of the public. For example, the diagram for public vistas and view corridors should be accompanied by strong, clear examples and actual real world locations in the CBD.
- Which of these have priority when staff evaluates a project: the need for 3d modeling, considering view corridors, proximity of a historic bldg, width of street, etc.
- We might need to overlay this on the tax maps to see what specific properties would be affected by each
- Some of these recommendations are for the UDO and some are design guidelines for design review. The distinction needs to be clearly stated in the summary.
- We are still waiting on the appendix for the last chapter (strategy 7)
- This plan has done a great job of turning project review into a logical process
- A different acronym for the possible Downtown Improvement District should be developed, not ADD (Asheville Downtown District).
- Does the Downtown Commission still have review over level 2 projects (yes)?
- Commission would like staff to review some development proposals/projects that have already been submitted, including City owned land and the FIRC/Fraga proposal.
- It appears the Commission would need to be restructured – that may take time and a reworked appointment process.
- It is probable that half of Fraga's project proposal would have passed and half would not have passed.
- The Ellington would have required reduced floorplates above the seventh floor.
- Perhaps there should not be special transitional height restrictions on S. Charlotte and I-240
- It is clear the community interprets height and 3d space in a different way than say the Downtown Commission or other design professionals; how are we going to help the community visualize?
- Commissioners are concerned that the suggested 3d model needs to be completed as early as possible – it will be the best way to help visualize the context of development proposals.

- The likely order of Council consideration of the plan will be City Council formal “acceptance” of the plan, followed by study, discussion, then formal adoption. After adoption, ordinances would be drafted and passed in a prioritized order. Everything would not be done at once.
- In order for the community to see the most positive change the first priority is likely to be changing the review process.
- The plan will need community champions to help support both adoption and establishment of priorities .
- The consultants are working on the implementation piece, which should provide more clarity as to the expected order of proceeding.
- If we can establish a widespread recognition that the plan’s essential elements are for everyone’s benefit, this plan can provide healing for community divisions and prove the community’s ability to make reasonable compromises.
- This plan represents an extensive new blueprint for downtown’s future. It captures 80 percent of what everybody wanted. Our challenge will be to stand behind it, and support it through the final adoption process at City Council.
- The plan should be sold as a whole, not piecemeal. If we agree that the plan, as a whole, represents a great improvement over our current situation and effects many positive changes, we should be prepared to counter arguments which choose the narrow perspective over the broad.
- We should be prepared to explain the positive tradeoffs both to the community and City Council.
- The plan is a challenging read and requires a substantial and thoughtful investment of time to fully understand.
- Improvement is needed on the cultural section; in particular the public art board and public art master plan need to be referenced. The art museum expansion project, which will anchor this proposed district, deserves highlighting.
- The Pack Square cultural district needs to be much better defined
- More details are needed on what kind of infrastructure would be needed for a performing arts center.
- The needs of arts employees, across all sectors of the arts, need to be addressed.
- How do we avoid the problem of people focusing too narrowly on aspects of their “pet” issues to the exclusion of the positive effects of the whole plan?
- Asheville doesn’t have a strong umbrella organization for all the arts and all arts sectors. That would have helped in overseeing the cultural recommendations. Given the disparate arts voices in the community, the Arts Council might find shepherding this part of the process challenging.
- The cultural section doesn’t speak strongly to the civic components of culture that great cities have in place - important identifying entities like a performing arts center and a support mechanism for public art.
- The arts institution issue might be an economic development issue that the Chamber can help with.
- With the way Asheville is marketed there are things that need to be supported, not just having a livable city.

- There was some concern about recommendations telling people they shouldn't drive.
- Given the paucity of parking there were questions about the recommendation that Rankin and other parking decks be converted to another use.
- The recent parking study, which told us where we needed other parking garages, should be an addendum to the master plan
- Having a one page summary that focuses people on issues and not on the minutia would be good.
- Quality and design excellence deserve strong emphasis. This is the focus of the Design Review process. It is that qualitative something that occurs from thoughtfully using guidelines and not just ordinances.
- There were strong reservations about the recommendation of what is effectively a transfer tax.
- There appear to be conflicting suggestions that the Haywood/Page property should be a park or a mixed use development. The recommendations should be more specific.
- Are chains/franchises specifically excluded or limited(no)?
- The review process is much clearer and more rational. It is a great improvement.
- While it might take a little more money for a developer on the front end, if they meet the community's clearly established requirements, they now would have assurance that they can do their project.
- There isn't enough explanation of how these things (community benefits??) would be funded. Perhaps that will be in the strategy 7 appendix.
- Our job is to review the plan and, after we are comfortable with the plan as a whole, we will pass the baton on to Planning & Zoning and City Council.

Next Step

Staff agreed to schedule a special meeting for the Advisory Panel and the Downtown Commission where staff would use the proposed standards and guidelines from this draft document to look at least 3 development proposals.

Meeting Adjourned